

EC retires Thames' No. 24



Louisville native Marcus Thames of the Detroit Tigers watches the ball fly during a game last year. The former East Central Community College standout had his number retired by the Warriors Saturday night. Photo by Chris Carlson/Associated Press

By Marty Stamper
Appeal Sports Editor

Marcus Thames joined a very select club Saturday night as his jersey No. 24 was retired in ceremonies at the preseason baseball banquet at East Central Community College.

Thames, a member of the 2006 American League champion Detroit Tigers, is the only living Warrior baseball player to have his number retired. The only other EC baseball member to have his jersey retired is the late Jamie Clark, Thames' coach for two memorable years at Decatur.

"It's amazing, coming from Louisville and running behind coach Clark's truck every morning around 6:15, I never thought my career would go this far," Thames said. "I just want to thank the coaches for making it possible to retire my number. I'm very honored to be a part of this."

"I'll never forget East Central. I love East Central. I always come back whenever I get a chance to. This is a very special night."

So special to Thames that he gave up a pair of Super Bowl tickets to attend the event.

Out of Louisville High School, Thames signed with ECCC where he was drafted by the New York Yankees in the 30th round following his freshman year.

Despite batting .382 with 14 doubles, seven triples, three homers, and 36 RBIs as a freshman in 1996, Thames opted to return for his sophomore year with the Warriors before inking with the Yankees prior to the 1997 draft.

Unlike most college players, Thames had limited experience prior to ECCC.

"I didn't get a chance to

start in high school until my senior year," Thames said. "A lot of guys would have quit, but I stayed out there the whole time and hit .505 my senior year. I came here to East Central and coach Clark gave me a chance to play."

"I always played baseball growing up, but I never thought that I'd get drafted. When the Yankees called, I wanted to go back to school and hone my skills a little bit. I came back and got a little bit better."

In '97, the Warriors won 40 games with Thames' batting at a school record .420 clip. He set additional school records with 13 homers and 70 RBIs.

"When you get drafted by the Yankees, you always want to take that and run with it, so I was happy to sign after my sophomore year," Thames said.

Labeled a prospect early in his professional career, some very productive years in the minor leagues earned him a grand total of 13 at-bats in the big leagues with New York. Two organizations later, Thames is showing he belongs in "The Show."

Tough Beginning

Compared to his early years, playing baseball is a breeze.

Thames' mother, Veterine, was paralyzed in an auto accident when he was just 5. He joined the National Guard later on to help make ends meet.

"It made me physically and mentally stronger. It makes you a man, it makes you more responsible," Thames said of his military experience.

Knowing his mom was able to raise five children despite her condition serves as Thames' inspiration.

"My mom is a big inspiration in my life. In June, she'll



have been paralyzed 25 years. I look at her — a person who can't even get themselves a glass of water — and what I go through in baseball is nothing compared to what she's going through.

"She's a very strong person and she keeps me going."

Quite a Debut

On June 10, 2002, Thames made his Major League debut in impressive fashion, taking his first pitch over the wall at Yankee Stadium. The blast came off Arizona ace Randy Johnson, who had won the National League Cy Young Award the previous year.

"He's a future Hall of Famer. He was a guy I had seen growing up striking a lot of people out. When I hit it, I was praying that it went over the fence. I got around the bases pretty quick," Thames said.

"There were 56,000 at Yankee Stadium that night and I had never had a standing ovation. Mr. (Joe) Torre and Derek Jeter pushed me out of the dugout and told me they wanted me to come out for a curtain call. I went out and it was amazing. I had tears in my eyes. I won't ever forget it."

2006 World Series

The Tigers' 2006 season was capped by a berth in the World Series where Detroit lost in five games to the St. Louis Cardinals.

"It's a kid's dream," Thames said of playing in the fall classic. "Playing in the country fields at home with my friends, making bases out of paper sacks, I never thought I'd play in a World Series."

"The day we played St. Louis that first game ... I never thought that I'd be standing on the first base line for the national anthem for the World Series."

During the regular season, Thames, 29, batted .256 in 110 games with 20 doubles, two triples, 26 homers, and 60 RBI.

"I'm still under contract with Detroit," Thames said. "I've trained hard this offseason. I don't worry about what's going to happen. I just try to control what I can control and play hard and work hard when I get to spring training."

"We picked up Gary Sheffield and that's a great pickup for the team. Hopefully, I can be with that organization and help them out some."

Union Appeal 2-7-07

Thames gets 11th homer for Tigers

Former East Central Community College standout Marcus Thames hit a three-run homer and Justin Verlander pitched seven innings as the Detroit Tigers beat the Mariners 11-7 Sunday in Seattle.

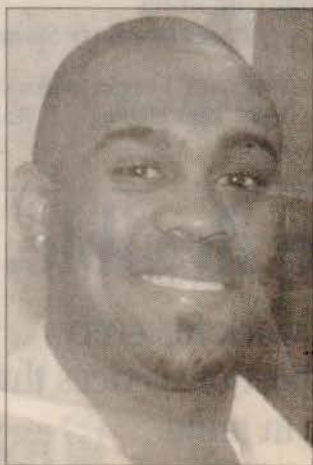
Thames' blast off Jeff Weaver came with two outs in the fourth inning.

The Louisville native finished with three hits and four RBIs as two of the hottest teams in baseball over the past six weeks split a four-game series.

For the year, Thames is batting .257 with 11 homers and 32 RBIs. He also has eight doubles.

In his six professional seasons, Thames is batting .244 with 45 doubles, two triples, 56 homers, and 147 RBIs.

He was a 30th round draft choice of the New York Yankees in the 1996 amateur draft.



Marcus Thames



THE 103RD WORLD SERIES CARDINALS VS. TIGERS



Jacquelyn Martin for The New York Times

Veterine Thames at home in Louisville, Miss., with, from left, her mother, Ethel, and daughters, Carnetta and Tabitha.

Flat on Her Back at the Heart of a Family

Continued From First Sports Page

as not injured.

Thames, 52, did not want to revisit the specifics of the crash. "I think about it all the time," she said in an interview at her home. "I want to get p, but I can't. It's hard. I used to cry all the time about the things I want to p."

Marcus, the middle child, was 5



he said he had never asked her about the accident. Like Veterine, Marcus said he had often pined for normalcy.

"I want her to be able to do things," he said. "I want to be able for her to walk around. That's my mom."

Thames (pronounced timms) added: "When I go to the field, I like to drive there by myself. I turn the radio off and I think about her. It lights a fire under me to get me going."

On an 88-degree day this week, Thames was propped up in bed in the bright, air-conditioned room, her gray-specked black hair tied behind her head. She was eager to talk about Marcus, whom she still sees as a little boy nicknamed Slick because he sucked his thumb. Before she could speak, she needed a tube inserted in her throat because of the tracheotomy she has had for four years.

Thames nearly cried before the third syllable. Speaking softly and pausing to catch her breath, she was teasing but truthful. She said she believed that her paralysis had motivated Marcus to excel. "It made him want to show that he could make something out of himself," she said.

After his mother's comments were relayed to Thames, he nodded.

"When you have somebody who can't get themselves a glass of water, you look at this baseball stuff and it's easy in comparison," Thames said Friday before the Tigers worked out at Comerica Park.

"You can't take life for granted. She was probably all happy and smiling that day. And, that night, boom, she can't move her legs anymore. It just made me a stronger person."

The accident caused the Thames family to mobilize, and caring for Veterine has been as natural to them as singing hymns. May simplified the devotion to caring for Veterine and her children by saying, "It was a job that had to be done, and someone did it."

Everyone did it. While Marcus lived with his Uncle Lester and Aunt Ada after the accident, his mother and four siblings lived with his grandmother Ethel Thames. At one point, Ethel, the mother of 11, had 18 people living in her home. She said she did not know how to make a



Above, Julie Jacobson/Associated Press; Thames family

Marcus Thames scoring on a triple in the seventh inning of Game 2 of the American League division series against the Yankees. Thames, below at left, with his sister Carnetta around 1980.

small meal and placed her hands 18 inches apart to show how high plates would be stacked.

About four years after Veterine was paralyzed, she shocked her mother by announcing that she planned to move into her own home with her five children, Stacy, Tabitha, Marcus, Carnetta and E. W. Ethel Thames was bewildered.

"I was worried that she wasn't going to make it," she said.

Veterine reasoned that they could stay together because Stacy, her oldest son, was 14 and responsible, and Tabitha, her oldest daughter, was 12 and could cook. She read recipes to Tabitha for chicken and pork chops, she reminded the children to do their homework and chores, and they somehow managed with about \$400 a month in welfare and food stamps. Marcus had to trudge to the grocery store and buy the right items on the list or, he said with a smile, risk being scolded by his mother and Tabitha. Kenny Gill, whom Veterine described as a special friend, moved in with them and is still caring for her.

When it came to disciplining her children, she would coax them to come close, place their heads on her shoulder and slap them with her other hand.

"Trust me, if she wanted to get you, she'd get you," Marcus said. "She'd call you over to the bed. You see her arms, they're big, and bam."

Although Thames is resourceful, she faces daily medical challenges. Seven months ago, May said, Veterine's heartbeat accelerated to a dangerous level.

"At 6 in the morning, we got word to come to the hospital because she was dying," May said. "By 1 in the afternoon, she was revived."

As May recounted that day, Thames never blinked.

"The doctors gave up on me two or three times," she said. "I didn't give up."

Marcus was a freshman in high school and Stacy was a freshman in college when their mother contract-

skipping two weeks of school to be with her.

"I said then, if I want something, I got to fight for it just like she's here fighting for her life," Thames said. "The doctors gave up on her. She kept fighting. When I got a chance to play and then I got sent down or got released by Texas, it just made me hungrier."

As usual, Veterine was released from the hospital and went back to her bedroom, which is filled with almost 50 family photographs. The

his mother a new house.

From the lush lawns and pristine homes at one end of Louisville to the ranch homes like the Thameses' on the dusty streets across the railroad tracks, everyone seemingly knows Marcus. At Louisville High School, the morning announcements include updates about his career. The athletes who congregated for football and baseball practice this week have repeatedly been told to try and emulate Thames.

"We use Marcus a lot," said Brad Peterson, the football coach, who played baseball with Thames. "We probably use him too much."

Thames, who lives about 30 miles away, in Starkville, in the off-season, has remained close with Charlie Smith, his former baseball coach. Smith planned to attend at least one World Series game.

"He wanted to play, he wanted to be good, and he's talented," Smith said. "But I think the driving force of his mom is 90 percent of it for him."

To earn extra money, Thames joined the National Guard after his junior year in high school. He gained 20 pounds during nine weeks of basic training and returned to school stronger and more confident. He was not a starter in baseball or football until his senior year.

"The National Guard made me," Thames said. "I was skinny and weak before I went there. I came back and I was a whole different person."

Thames, his mother and his brothers and sisters will always be different. They are a proud, spiritual, connected family.

Thames said the years had not made it easier to accept his mother's disability. He wishes she could attend the World Series. Instead, she will watch her Slick on television, from the bed that has been and will always be her home.

"When Marcus was little, he always said that he was going to play ball," she said. "When I see him on



largest picture is of Marcus.

The Yankees drafted him out of East Central Community College in Decatur, Miss., in 1996. Thames made his major league debut in 2002 with the Yankees, and he homered off Randy Johnson on the first pitch he saw. He played briefly with the Texas Rangers in 2003 and bounced between Detroit and Class AAA Toledo in 2004 and 2005.

Thames said that he hoped to win a title with the Tigers — which would probably mean a World Series share



Sports Sunday

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Section 8

WORLD SERIES CARDINALS VS. TIGERS

n. today at Detroit TV: Fox

A Factory Laborer in Cleats, Leyland Is a Symbol of a City

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Marlins.

He knows, like Motor City, about the remains of a fall, what it's like to be on blocks. He was out of manager options for six years before rushing to his first managerial offer since he hit bottom in Colorado. He bolted breathlessly for Detroit, the poorest large city in America, typecast with its vacant lots and depressed auto industry and a Tigers team that had boarded up hope.

In his topography, in his journey, in his unthinkable revival, Leyland is Detroit. And of all small-town Jims, a guy reared in Perrysburg, Ohio, Leyland is urban renewal.

"When I heard Jimmy Leyland when he

first came to town, how he talked about winning and championships and revival, I knew people didn't believe him," Kwame M. Kilpatrick, Detroit's young, energetic mayor, said Friday. "But there is a spirit of can-do here. You can change the culture. You can do anything. Here we are, we're playing for the world championship."

The city's hope brokers were host to the Super Bowl in February, but that was a party for everyone else. The Super Bowl is a gilded squatter, plopping down, not moving for a week, so every outsider in a limo can pull up to indulge. The World Series is local, not global, and it's a party for the people.

"It's interesting to me," Kilpatrick added, "how this issue of a baseball team has turned into an example of hope for the city."

Leyland's Tigers are reflective of what can develop from a renovation of ideas — and blind faith. For three years, General Manager Dave Dombrowski had to overpay players like Pudge Rodríguez in an effort to lure talent to this losers' abyss. He assembled a collection of castoffs and spare parts from trades gone wrong, and trusted untested youth.

To pull together a team of square wheels, forgotten veterans and rookies on

Continued on Page 3

Bats

Times staffers will track Game 2 of the World Series tonight and blog from Comerica Park at:
nytimes.com/sports

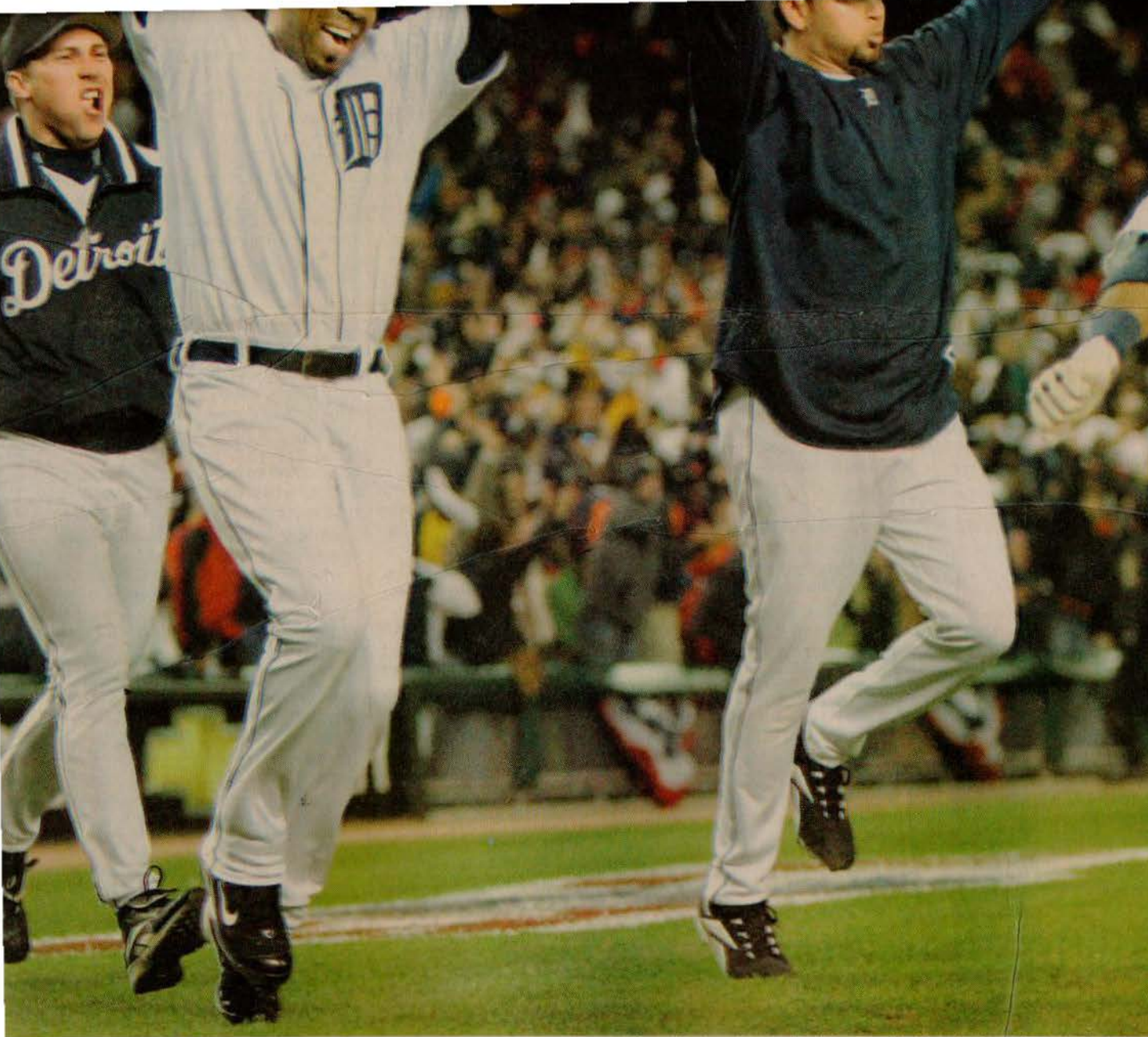
CHANGING CARDINALS

In St. Louis, the turnover is great, but so are the results.

PAGE 2



Flat
On Her Back



At the Heart Of a Family

Marcus Thames's Mother Inspires and Amazes

By JACK CURRY

DETROIT, Oct. 21 — Veterine Thames watches the world from a custom hospital bed in the back room of a modest yet bustling five-bedroom brick-and-aluminum-sided ranch in Louisville, Miss. She cannot move her legs, she cannot move her torso and she cannot grasp anything. She has been in this condition for more than 24 years.

But Thames can talk, she can see and she has persevered. She reared five children, mostly on her own, while lying on her back. One of them is Marcus Thames, who plays for the American League champion Detroit Tigers.

When Thames bats against the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series, many fans may know him as an outfielder and designated hitter who labored through parts of nine seasons in the minor leagues. He emerged this season as a solid power hitter with 26 homers in 348 at-bats. Finally, at 29, Thames made an impact in the major leagues. As Veterine's son, it was only natural that Marcus would persevere.

But most fans do not know 1 percent of his life story. An automobile accident on June 19, 1982, changed everything. It brought his tight family even closer and maybe, in a way, helped Thames become a survivor.

The accident happened on State Highway 14 in Louisville. Veterine was a passenger in a car driven by G. W. Hughes, the father of four of her children, including Marcus. Two vertebrae in her spine were seriously damaged, said Ethel May, Veterine's sister. Hughes, who was not much involved in his children's lives,

Above, Elise Amendola, Associated Press; top right, Jacquelyn Martin for The New York Times

ter, celebrating after the Tigers won the A.L.C.S. His mother, Veterine, above right, was paralyzed in an auto accident in 1982.

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THE 103RD WORLD SERIES CARDINALS VS. TIGERS





Major League Baseball: Playoffs

League Divisional Series

Clarion Ledger 10/6/06



Kathy Willens/Thasociated Press

The Tigers' Marcus Thames, a Louisville native and former East Central Community College star, is greeted by Sean Casey (left) and Omar Infante (right) after scoring in the fifth inning of Thursday's win over the Yankees. Thames, Detroit's DH, went 3-for-4, scored twice and drove a run.

Detroit's arms deliver knockout punch

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Justin Verlander overpowered Alex Rodriguez with 100 mph heat. Joel Zumaya topped that, his fastball whizzing by at 102.

TODAY

- Game 3: at Detroit
- When: 7 p.m.
- TV: ESPN

Thursday to leave them tied at one game apiece in their best-of-5 AL playoff series.

"There's a lot of people doubting us," Zumaya said. "A lot of people don't expect the Tigers to come out and play as good as we did.

The New York Yankees never saw what was coming. Verlander and Detroit's bullpen held down New York's mighty offense, Curtis Granderson's go-ahead triple off Mike Mussina capped a comeback and the Tigers beat the Yankees 4-3

Tigers 4, Yankees 3

Series tied 1-1

We have to prove ourselves and, obviously, we proved it a little bit today."

Verlander, like Zumaya one of Detroit's rookie sensations, pitched in and out of trouble for 5½ innings, allowing seven hits and four walks. He gave up his only runs on Johnny Damon's fourth-inning homer, which put New York ahead 3-1.

Tigers manager Jim Leyland then made the unusual move to pull him with a runner on, one out and a 1-1 count on Robinson Cano. Former Jackson General Jamie Walker came in, threw two balls and induced an inning-ending double play.

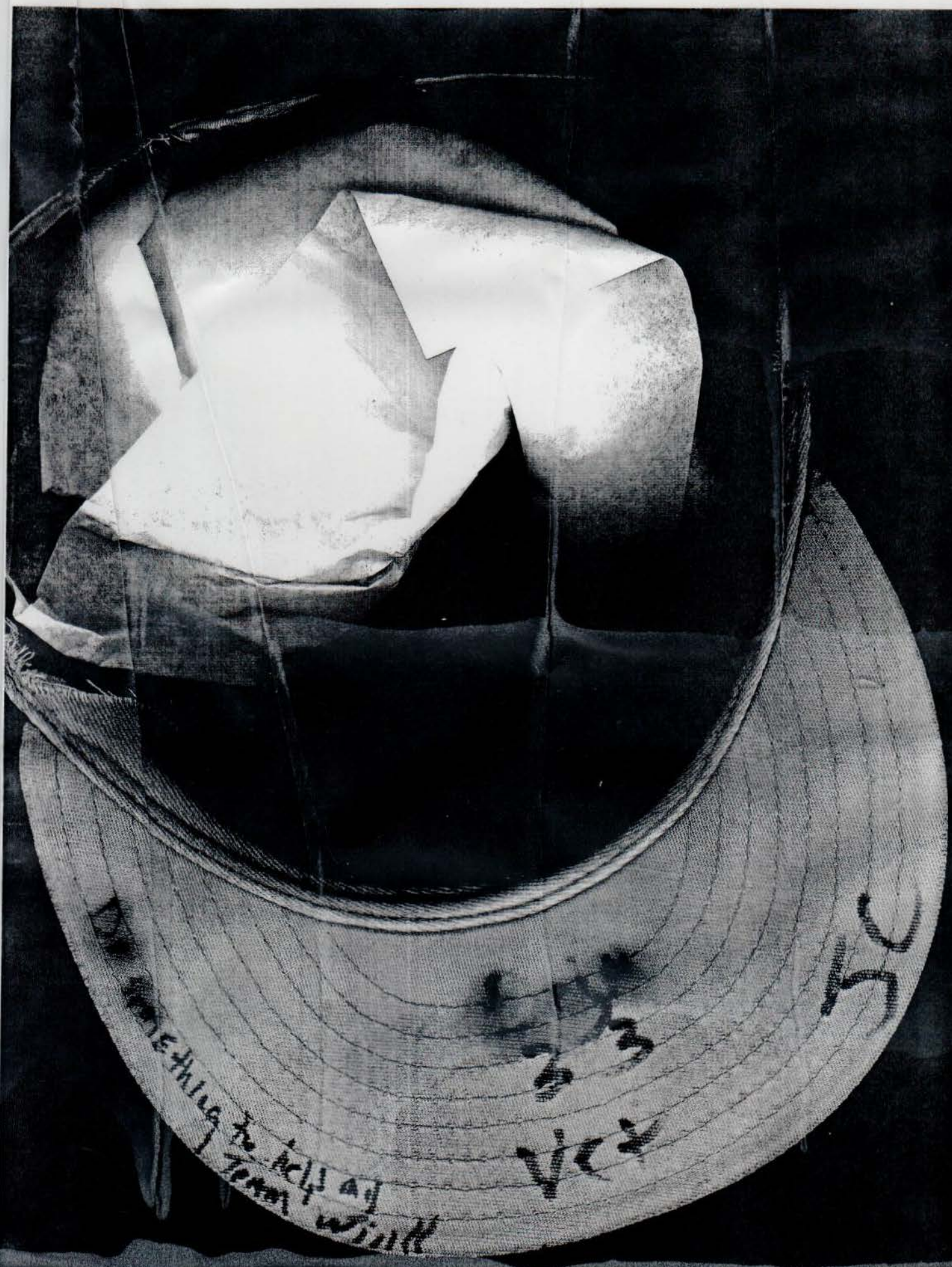
It was that type of up-and-down day for the wild card Tigers, who ended a six-game losing streak that cost them the AL Central title last weekend.

"I just didn't like the fastball here that. It was 92," Leyland said. "I just said, 'is it. I'm going to make my move now. I know there's a count on the hitter, but I'm going to make it right now.' Just all of a sudden, your instincts take over and say, 'Look, this is just right.'"

Those type of against-the-bank moves helped Leyland turn around the Tigers in his first year as manager, stopping Detroit's streak of losing seasons at 12.

Walker, Zumaya and ex-General Ed Jones combined for one-hit relief, making New York's modern-day Murderers' Row resemble over-matched kids. Jones pitched the ninth for the save.

New York's All-Star batting order ruck out nine times and went 1-for-8 with men scoring position. Rodriguez was 0-for-4 with three strikeouts.



Do something to help a team win

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